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Author(s): Frank Friedeberg Seeley

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RUSSIA AND THE SLAVE TRADE¹

THE slave trade—any slave trade—may be interesting from three points of view: that of the country from which the slaves are drained, that of the country which carries them away, and that of the country which receives and tries to fit them into its economic and social system. The later phases of the Russian slave trade claim attention for all three aspects.

The history of this trade is traceable over upwards of 2,000 years; and during that period the conditions at the Russian end hardly altered. The chief changes were in the names of the peoples playing the chief parts. So it may be worth while to attempt an outline sketch of the Russian setting, before focusing our more detailed attention on the Tatar period, which is not only the best documented but the most curious and important historically.

Russia is divided latitudinally into three great geographical zones: in the north, the tundra; in the centre, the forests; and south of the forests—i.e. roughly of a line drawn between Chernigov and Kazan—the steppe, stretching down to the Caucasus and to the Black and Caspian Seas. The tundra has never had any historical significance. The forest had little or none till comparatively recently—say, eleven centuries ago—when the Slav tribes, which had entered it from the west at some undetermined antecedent time, were organised by the Swedish Vikings for a struggle against the steppe, which was to be fought out with varying fortune through no less than 900 years and to form, one may say, the warp of Russian history. The steppe, on the other hand, has played a capital part in history as far back as history can be followed; and not least in the Russian slave trade. So it is of the steppe and its inhabitants that we must first form a clear picture.

North of the mountain ranges that are the backbone of the Old World the great Eurasian plain stretches most of the way from the Baltic to the Pacific. Its eastern part is largely a desert of rock and sand; and even west of the Altai there are plenty of islands of such desert. But here—interlacing the desert and bordering it broadly to the north and west—are great stretches of grass-land, which form the steppe in the narrower sense. Yet loosely the whole region of plain between the mountains in the south and the forests in the north may be called the great Eurasian steppe.

This great steppe has three chief characteristics: First: its flatness. Second, its extreme climate: there is very little rainfall over the area as a whole, and the difference between the mean summer and winter temperature is in Central Asia five or six times as great as with us. And third, as a result of the climate some parts of the steppe are absolute desert, while the less extreme produce only grasses: trees have no chance to grow, and east of the Urals agriculture was in the past largely impossible.

In fact over most of the Asiatic steppe there was only one practicable way of life for men: that of nomad herdsmen. Man mastered the steppe by becoming a parasite of his herds. Or perhaps it is an exaggeration to say: "man mastered the steppe". He learned to live there—as he may learn to live in prison. But the iron conditions of the steppe clamped him in an inexorable mould. There is nothing more striking than the uniformity of steppe societies, irrespective of differences of time, place and race. Herodotus' description of the Scyths, whom he knew in South Russia in the fifth century B.C., applies in all essentials to the Tatars, who appeared nearly 2,000 years later, certainly spoke a different language, and almost certainly belonged to a different ethnic

¹ Of the many authorities, mediæval and modern, consulted in preparing this paper, no mention can be made. Acknowledgment is, however, necessary to two contemporary works: Lybyer, *Government of the Ottoman Empire in the time of Suleiman the Magnificent*, and Toynbee, *The Study of History*. It will be recognised that my account of the Ottoman system is largely summarised from Lybyer.

stock. There is identity not just of material culture and mode of life, but of constitution and character.

The economy of the steppe nomads was based chiefly on the horse. For the horse the flatness, dryness and grassiness of the steppe offered ideal living conditions. And only the horse could both face the greatest climatic rigours of the steppe, and enable the nomads to cover the long distances between summer and winter pastures—sometimes as much as 1,000 miles. For in winter the northern parkland is deep under snow; while in summer the southern highlands are scorched bare of vegetation; so the herds must move between one and the other, taking advantage of the often brief eruption of plant life in the intermediate zones.

But the horse is not for the nomad merely or mainly a means of transport. The nomad lives on and off his horses. On his horse: for he not only travels but often eats, holds council and even sleeps in the saddle. Off his horse: for their milk forms his staple diet (not raw, except for medicinal purposes, but as butter, or cheese, or fermented into kumys); their hides and hair provide leather and felt for tents, clothes, curtains, mattresses, cushions and containers; their sinews—his cordage; their fat—tallow for lighting; their dung and bones—his fuel.

The usual nomad dwelling is a tent, perhaps 30 ft. in diameter and 15 ft. high, with accommodation for up to forty people by day and twenty by night. It consists of a framework of light sections, easily dismountable and transportable, and a covering of felt, often lined with grasses, with a hole in the roof for daylight and ventilation.

Physically these peoples are noted for their robustness and powers of endurance: they can, it is said, go for days without drink, or without food for six weeks—and then eat an old wether at a sitting. But they are lazy and dirty: all their washing is done in the first six months of their lives—purely for the hardening effect, be it said—and they have a great respect for corpulence and drunkenness. The moral qualities by which they most impressed their sedentary neighbours were treachery and ferocity. Perhaps one should say: "their immediate neighbours"; for both in Greece and in China people at a distance were sometimes ready to draw nostalgic pictures of the "noble savage".

Though rare instances of matriarchy are quoted—never, I think, at first hand—in general all the heavy work is done by the women. So girls have to undergo a most exacting education to justify the price their father expects to get for them when they marry. Boys need to learn only riding and shooting, to which they may be set before they are weaned.

The social unit is the tent, i.e. the patriarchal family comprising several generations and several families as we use the word—to designate a married couple and their children. The tent is also the economic unit, and is, broadly speaking, self-sufficing: that is, its herds produce and its members process and manufacture all the requirements of daily life.

Tents usually combine—primarily for mutual protection—in camps, the size of which is limited by the extent of grazing facilities. Camps recognise a certain affinity with other camps of the same clan, and clans with other clans of the same tribe or folk. And every so often a man of exceptional ability will take advantage of circumstances, such as scarcity of food or the weakness of some civilised state on the periphery of the steppe—to impose his leadership on a number of tribes and so form one of the so-called steppe "empires", which rarely outlasted their founder for long.

Of course this general and summary sketch of the Eurasian nomads applies primarily to the hard core of the steppe. In particular regions special conditions might modify the picture more or less considerably. For instance in the climatically more favoured zones it was possible to keep sheep and cattle as well as horses. In the flatter parts the tent or dwelling was often mounted on wheeled waggons. And all along its southern edge the steppe marched with sedentary societies, many of them in a comparatively advanced stage of civilisation; so

that along this whole frontier belt and often well behind it the nomads were exposed to, and in their turn exerted, strong and various influences and entered into more or less complex relations.

But our concern here is not with the causes and scope of nomad eruptions from the steppe ; nor yet with their two main functions in history : on the steppe as cultural connecting links between distinct civilisations, and off the steppe as liquidators of decrepit empires. Our concern is with their rôle in South Russia.

The South Russian sector of the steppe is peculiar in two respects. Though of course admirably adapted to the nomad way of life, it is also, unlike most parts of the Asiatic steppe, adapted to other ways of life, such as that of sedentary agriculturalists, who have in fact colonised parts of it ever since neolithic times. And moreover for most of the last 3,000 years it has had a considerable transit and export trade. As regards transit—it carried important trade routes from Northern Europe to South-East Europe and the Near East, as well as from Southern and Central Europe to the Far East. As for export—besides the surplus of cereals from the famous black earth, there was always wealth of fish from the great rivers, salt from the limans, and the produce of the forests : furs, honey, wax, timber and slaves.

So when a nomad horde burst out of Asia into these rich plains—and between the early Iron Age and the late Middle Ages a new horde appeared on an average every 150 years or so—what happened—unless and until it was broken or thrust on into Europe by some succeeding horde—was roughly this :

The nomads established themselves between the Volga (or the Don) and the Dnieper, keeping in the main to their traditional way of life. In summer they ranged over the steppe with their herds ; but often they built towns, to which at least the king and the nobles withdrew during the winter. They levied tribute in kind both on the husbandmen they found in the steppe and, so far as possible, on the forest-dwellers to the north. The more intelligent of them encouraged foreign trade by allowing seafaring peoples to build factories and cities along the Black Sea coast, where the produce of steppe and forest was exchanged for the produce and manufactures of Mediterranean and Eastern lands ; or they turned their own towns into such centres of exchange. But wherever the trade was conducted, the nomads took a heavy toll, on the strength of which their leaders were able to surround themselves with all the material luxuries of civilisation.

The history of this trade has yet to be written. But probably it is not just the accident of documentation which leaves the impression that the two peak periods fell towards the beginning and the end of the nomad era : under the Scyths and under the Tatars. The seafaring traders of the Scythian period were the Ionians and, later, the Athenians. Even as early as that, human exports were among the most prized of Russian products. We know that at one time the Athenian police force was staffed by Scythian slaves ; in fact the current Attic equivalent of our "bobby" was *Σκύθης*. After the Athenians the Rhodians ruled the seas ; in the first century of our era the Black Sea became a Roman sphere of interest ; the Romans were succeeded by the Byzantines, and these by the Venetians and the Genoese.

Of course the development of Constantinople as the capital of the Roman Empire offered a great new market for the Black Sea traders ; and when, between the seventh and the tenth century, the Arab conquest of North Africa, Spain, Sicily and the lesser islands turned the Western Mediterranean into an Arab lake and, by cutting the trade routes, plunged Western Europe into the stagnation of autarkic agriculturalism and feudalism, Russian trade must have received a further impetus.

At that time the lords of the steppe were a Turkic horde called the Khazars, whose capital, Itil, not far from present-day Astrakhan, was a busy mart, to which merchants of the Baghdad Caliphate flocked to buy the products of Russia, including slaves. These were brought down the Volga by the Bulgars,

who lived higher up the river on the edge of the forest zone ; and later by the Vikings, who alternately championed and harried the Slavs, raiding Slav villages, as the Arab travellers inform us, and carrying off large numbers of captives on their long ships for sale to the Moslems either at Bolgaria or at Itil. Great hoards of Moslem coins found in Russia south of a line from Kazan to Novgorod—and further west in Scandinavia—bear witness to the briskness of the trade in this period, especially as only a small proportion of goods can normally have been paid for in cash.

But the Norsemen not only traded with the Caliphate through the Khazars ; they took entirely into their own hands the trade with Byzantium, on which they made a series of attacks (860, 912, 941, 943, 1043) as a means of securing acceptable commercial terms. By this time they had put themselves at the head of the Slavs ; but their grandiose plan of smashing the domination of the Khazar Khanate and entering into the heritage of its political and economic powers, after a moment in which success seemed possible, turned out a spectacular failure. Sviatoslav broke the Khazars and Bulgars easily enough, but was himself utterly discomfited by the Roman Emperor John Tsimiskes ; and his successors reaped the usual penalty for the destruction of buffer states, when the South Russian steppe was flooded by a new and more savage horde—the Pólovtsy or Cumans—who virtually cut the Russians off from the sea for half a century and terrorised the people into wholesale migration : north-westward and north-eastward into the protection of the forest. So that “Kievan Rus” had really capitulated to the steppe seventy or a hundred years before the appearance of the Tatars.

The Tatars remained lords of the South Russian steppe from 1237 till 1475, when they—or at any rate the rump Khanate of the Crimea—submitted to Ottoman suzerainty. The Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan were conquered by Muscovy three-quarters of a century later under Ivan IV.

In their heyday the Tatars of the Golden Horde controlled effectively not only the steppe but the forest principalities of Great Russia ; exercised a more formal paramountcy over the Republic of Novgorod and the great West Russian principality of Galic (Galicia and Volhynia) and meddled with varying success in the politics of Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary and Poland.

Their two chief towns, Old Sarai, near the former Itil and the present Astrakhan, and New Sarai, now Tsariov, east of Stalingrad, were not only great administrative and trading centres, but solid and imposing cities with a large artisan population drawn from the ends of the earth, with whole districts built of brick, with potash kilns, brick factories, pottery workshops and forges, not to mention the shops of gold and silversmiths and other purveyors to the Khans’ Court. Amenities included a water-supply piped to factories and private houses ; heating systems ; and marble and mosaic decorations which show some concern for form.

All this was rooted in trade rather than military power. Of course the Tatar Empire had been forged by military power ; but the popular conception of the Tatars tends to too exclusive concentration on the period of conquest with its military prodigies and its much-publicised atrocities. Once in possession of their new territories, the Tatars soon realised it was to their advantage to make them as prosperous as possible. They were after all masters of the most extensive empire the world had ever seen. This was now a single economic area, threaded by a singularly far-flung and efficient system of communications, along which merchants of every country could move in peace and safety. And they set themselves to promote trade.

In South Russia the Golden Horde had only to continue the policy of its predecessors, from the Scyths to the Khazars. Foreign trade was now in the hands mainly of the Venetians, who had played such a part in founding the Latin Empire of Constantinople. But in 1261 that Empire was finally overthrown ; Constantinople passed back into the Greek hands of Michael Palaeologus, who had been supported by Venice’s rival, Genoa. In gratitude Michael gave

the Genoese a free hand in the Black Sea ; the Venetians had to wait till Byzantine resentment—and gratitude—had cooled before they could trade there at all.

The Genoese obtained the Khan's licence to build themselves a trading-post on the south-east coast of the Crimea, at Caffa (now Feodosia), which in the course of the 200-odd years of their rule grew into a town of 8,000 houses and 70,000 souls.

The Venetians, when they were allowed back, had to content themselves with a mere concession in the town of Tana (now Azov) near the mouth of the Don. This was indeed nearer to the Russian sources of supply ; but correspondingly exposed to the temperamental ebullitions of the Tatars, which permitted it only a very chequered career. But the importance of its trade may be gauged from the fact that the temporary expulsion of the Venetians from their foothold there in 1343, following a brawl in which a Tatar had been killed, resulted in a dearth of corn and salt fish at Constantinople and doubled the price of spices in Italy.

The history of the Italians in the Black Sea was conditioned, like their history in the Mediterranean, by the bitterness of the inter-state struggle : Genoese fought Venetians with equal zest—but with better success, thanks to their strongly entrenched position at Caffa, which they spared no effort, military or diplomatic, to turn into the chief mart of the Black Sea. Patrons of Tana and other ports were harried or penalised.

The city was so strongly fortified—once the Tatars had driven home the need for walls by sacking unwalled Caffa in 1298 and again in 1308, when the Genoese were driven clean out of the Crimea for five years till the Khan died—that, from the time of Uzbeg on, it defied all Tatar attacks including Janibeg's three-year siege in the 1340's. Incidentally it was thus that the Black Death came to Europe : it was raging in the Tatar camp, and when they failed to seize the place, they took to throwing their dead over the walls. So the infection was introduced into Caffa, and travelled west in Genoese ships.

The importance of Caffa was clearly indicated when (in 1318) the Pope created a see there, with jurisdiction from Varna to Sarai, to look after the interests of the Christians of the region.

The city was administered by a governor appointed by Genoa, working with a Grand Council, in which twenty of the twenty-four members were Genoese, and a Lesser Council, where the Genoese numbered five out of six. The prosperity of the colony varied of course with the fluctuations of Byzantine and Tatar politics. After the siege of Janibeg the Genoese profited by weakness and dissension in the Horde to extend their sway all round the south coast of the Crimea as far as Balaclava and over a good deal of the Gothic hinterland. And they maintained themselves pluckily till the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople sealed the doom of Italian trade with the Black Sea. Muhammad the Conqueror imposed a heavy tribute on Caffa in 1466 and captured it in 1475.

The slave trade, of which Caffa formed one of the principal outlets, had to be carried on behind a curtain of pretences. For the Tatars would not allow the enslavement of any of their own people, or, after their conversion to Islâm under Uzbeg (1312-40), of any of their co-religionaries. The Bishop was there to see that no Christians were enslaved. So that in theory the trade should have been restricted to such small Caucasian tribes, if any, as had remained pagan. But in fact the demand was far too great for such trifling. Agents of the Sultans were in residence to supervise the purchase and shipment of the slaves brought in by the Tatars. These were mainly either Russians or Caucasians.

In the 240 years from 1228 to 1468 the Russians were involved in ninety internal and 160 external wars, including forty-five against the Tatars ; so that there can rarely have been any lack of prisoners of war to sell. But when there was, the Tatars thought nothing of organising special slave-raids, both in Russian territory and in the Caucasus. Not that the peoples of the Caucasus

always waited to be raided : we are told that the Mingrelians used to sell into slavery all those of their children who outraged national honour by failing to master the national art—of thieving ; while other neighbouring tribes sold their offspring on the more prosaic grounds of poverty.

Unfortunately the Russians, and probably most of the Caucasian slaves too, were Christians. So the Italians had to find various ways of salving their consciences. Sometimes they would charter their ships—at exorbitant rates, naturally—to Egyptians and others who had no qualms about Christians. Or else they would manage to persuade themselves that it would be wrong to class schismatics as Christians. But nobody need think any more unkindly of the Genoese on that account. For the profits of the trade were commonly in the neighbourhood of 1,000% ; and what modern business man would care to deny that such a figure is calculated to blur the fine distinction between heretics and infidels ?

But the most interesting thing about the slaves was perhaps their destinations. Some, one is surprised to learn, went west—literally. In the fourteenth century Florence counted its slaves by hundreds, Venice and Genoa by thousands. In the last third of that century we happen to know that at Florence alone no less than 389 slave-sales were held in thirty-three years—an average of one a month. And whereas in the East the most prized slaves were Tatars, in Italy the highest prices were fetched by Russian girls. Of course, after the fall of Constantinople this traffic came to an end. In 1459 we find the Venetian Senate lamenting the scarcity of slaves. Yet forty years later there were still in Venice 3,000 slaves of Tatar and African extraction, besides an unspecified number of Slavs.

The majority of Russian slaves, however, found their way to the Near and Middle East. In fact every Turkish court in these regions was a possible destination for them. They were needed as pages, as soldiers, and for the harem. If we follow Ibn Battûta on his travels, we can't help noticing how, everywhere he goes, his princely hosts as a matter of course present him with such pages and girls ; and if he strikes a bad patch, he never hesitates to put his hand in his own pocket to get comfort for his loneliness.

Two avenues of this trade were of first-class historical importance ; those which led to Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. Here we are brought face to face with the phenomenon of the Slave State, which, although analogies have appeared elsewhere, seems in its full-blown form to have been a monstrous peculiarity of the Islamic world. Empires which have felt unequal to maintaining with the sword what they had won with the sword have always been tempted to trust themselves to the protection of mercenaries drawn either from their own dominions or beyond. But nowhere else, I think, do we encounter a settled policy of recruiting these mercenaries exclusively from slaves bought or captured from alien civilisations, and investing them not only with full military authority, but with supreme administrative power and even, in one case at least, sovereign power. Yet that is what we find alike in the eastern marches of Islâm—in Hindustân and in that Sâmânîd kingdom of Khurâsân and Transoxania with which the Khazars and the Russians drove such a thriving trade ; in the heart of the Caliphate ; in Egypt ; and on the far-western marches : in Spain. In Spain we actually find a most important contingent of the Caliph's bodyguard made up of Slavs ; and later, when the Caliphate began to break up into petty kingdoms, one of these Slavs is said to have founded a line of kings in Valencia.

Egypt was, however, quite unique among all these Islamic states in that not only its military and administrative class, but its Sultans too were foreign-born non-Moslem slaves (i.e. converted to Islâm only after their enslavement) ; and of these rulers all but a few—all the ablest—were natives of lands that are now Russian : at first of Qipchâq (i.e. the South Russian steppe : properly it was the name of the Turkish predecessors of the Tatars whom the Russians called Polovtsy and the West called Cumans, but after they had been ousted

by the Tatars, the name continued to designate the lands which they had ruled) and later of Circassia.

These sultans and their governing class were alike known as Mamlûks : an Arabic word meaning " chattel ".

The Mamlûk sultanate lasted from 1250 till 1517 ; and even after 1517, when Egypt was conquered by the Ottoman Sultan Selîm I, although the Egyptian sultanate was abolished, yet effective power continued to be exercised for nearly three centuries longer by Mamlûk soldiers and administrators, over whom the Ottoman Pashâ of Egypt held, after the first fifty years, an ever more shadowy authority.

It is hardly necessary to recall that the period of the Mamlûk sultanate was one in which Egypt was the premier Power in the Middle East. It was by Mamlûk Sultans that the Tatar advance was checked and rolled back to the Euphrates ; that the Frankish Crusaders were ejected from their last footholds in the Levant ; Syria reduced to allegiance ; and the whole of Christian Europe kept in awe and finally forced to despair of regaining the Holy Places. Baibars (1260-77), the great ruler who stemmed the Tatar invasion of Syria, subdued Nubia and waged constantly successful war against the Franks, was himself originally a slave-boy from Qipchâq. When offered for sale in the market at Damascus he fetched 800 silver pieces, which, however, had later to be refunded when a filthy defect was discovered in one of his blue eyes. Blue eyes obviously suggest an admixture of Slav, or possibly Caucasian blood. One of his successors was proud to be surnamed Al-alfî in virtue of his having originally fetched 1,000 pieces of gold.

Under this régime Mamlûks who had not been bought but had offered themselves as slaves were despised. And property passed as a rule not from father to son but from slave to slave.

But it was perhaps in the Ottoman Empire that the system of the Slave State achieved its greatest triumphs.

If we look at that Empire in the days of its greatness, we can distinguish three social elements overlying the masses of the peasantry, Christian and Moslem.

First, there is the free-born Moslem gentry : a class of feudal landowners, enjoying their lands and serving in war on conditions roughly similar to those of feudatories in Western Europe.

Secondly, there is what—for want of a better name—we may inaccurately call " the Church ", which, besides its purely religious duties, has charge of the interpretation and administration of the Sacred Law, and controls and runs not only its own very considerable estates but also multitudinous charitable and educational foundations : schools, almshouses, hospitals and the like.

The third body consists of the personnel of the secular state administration and the standing army, comprising the family of the Sultan, the Imperial Household, the executive officers of the Government, the professional infantry and cavalry forces known respectively as the Janissaries and the Spahis of the Porte, together with the large body of young men who at any given time were in process of being educated for service in the Court, the Government and the standing army. We may call this third body " the state machine ".

Now, with negligible exceptions, every member of this state machine was characterised by two peculiarities which must strike the modern Westerner as nothing less than amazing. Firstly, they were all, save a very few, children of Christian parents ; and secondly, they entered the state service as slaves of the Sultan, and slaves of the Sultan they remained all their lives, no matter to what height of power, wealth or greatness they might rise.

Though the children of the highest officers might be allowed to enter the state machine, neither their further descendants nor even the children of other personnel were admitted, so long as the system remained sound. Hence, of course, the membership had to be constantly replenished from outside ; and this was done in one of four ways.

Firstly, the slaves might be captured in war. Secondly, they might be presented to the Sultan. Thirdly, they might be bought in the open market; an English ambassador to the Porte speaks in the seventeenth century of 20,000 slaves being sold annually in the markets of Constantinople; and, clearly, the capital was only one of many markets to which mainly the choicest wares would be brought. Fourthly, a levy would be made from among the Sultan's Christian subjects: every three or four years, or oftener if war casualties or other special reasons made it necessary, agents of the Sultan would make a tour of the Balkan lands and, after consulting the parish registers, carry off so and so many thousands of the handsomest and healthiest Christian boys between ten and twenty years of age, for the service of their Imperial master. Needless to say, it was the two latter sources of supply—the levy and the market—which furnished the bulk of the recruits; and the market must have been stocked mainly from Russia, though no doubt forays into the Habsburg lands and even the Barbary pirates furnished a proportion.

From among these captives and the tribute children the finest physical specimens were selected for the service of the Sultan. The girls were drafted into the harem, where they too remained the slaves of the Sultan, those who were not called upon to minister to his pleasures becoming in due course the wives of his dignitaries and officers. They rarely became wives of the Sultans. In fact in the 120 years between Bâyazîd I and Sulaimân no Sultan married any of the mothers of his children. And Sulaimân's marriage to the Russian girl, Khurrem, was perhaps the most disastrous single act of any Sultan up till then, and exerted a most baneful influence on the fortunes of the Empire.

In general, then, the Sultans, though not themselves slaves like the Mamlûks, were the sons of slave women, the concubines and not the wives of their predecessor.

If we turn to the boy slaves, we see that their first duty was to accept Islâm. Into this step they seem to have been rather persuaded than coerced; but once it was taken, the most dazzling prospects opened before them: a career in which promotion depended entirely on their own abilities, which were assisted and developed by all the resources of an educational system "carefully designed to make the best use of each individual for the greater glory of the Sultan".

The boys were first submitted to a series of physical and intellectual tests. On the results of these they were provisionally assigned to one of two courses of training: a lower and a higher. Their advancement along either of these courses, their promotion or degradation from one to the other, or their complete ejection from the system depended at every stage solely on the merit of the individual, on his performance. Considering how far the most advanced "democracies" of to-day are from any correlation between merit and function, we can easily understand the sort of envious admiration which the system then aroused in the more intelligent of its Western observers.

Let us glance briefly at each course in turn.

The boys in the lower course were first hired out to private landholders in Asia Minor, where they spent three or four years learning Turkish, preparing for their conversion to Islâm, and being thoroughly broken in to hard work, rough living conditions and obedience. Then they were brought back to Constantinople to be re-examined and graded. The more promising were then set to work in the gardens of the Imperial palaces; the others were sent into the shipyards or set to demolition-work, road-laying and other public works in the service either of the State or of private contractors; and some were drafted into the naval base at Gallipoli. These last eventually became sailors, if they qualified; the Imperial gardeners who made good were eventually promoted to form the transport, commissariat and artillery corps of the Army; while the rest entered the messes of the Janissaries, i.e. the Imperial infantry. Here the tyros underwent a period of something like a novitiate. They were supplied with uniforms and food and some pay, and they were drilled and trained by the veterans; in exchange they had to undertake the fatigues and other services

of the messes. Finally, when they had proved themselves in battle, they were advanced to the dignity and pay of full-fledged Janissaries.

The Janissaries were the backbone of the Ottoman army, which carved out and maintained the vast Turkish Empire against the most desperate efforts of the flower of Christendom. They contrived this feat by achieving in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries levels of organisation and discipline undreamed of by the rabble of feudal levies and the uncontrollable and undependable mercenaries who then formed the armies of Europe. Europe achieved such organisation and discipline only in the eighteenth century, when Turkish power was already on the wane. But the order, decency and hygiene of the Janissaries' camps described by Busbecq could only be matched in our own day; while their sobriety remains unapproached. For an Ottoman soldier to drink spirits on campaign was punishable by death.

In a state like that of the Ottomans, "born of war and organised for conquest", the members of the state machine had to play an administrative as well as a military rôle. The Janissary doubled the parts of soldier, policeman and minor civil servant. Scattered up and down the Empire among an alien population, the Janissaries lived in messes of ten, each under an officer. The modesty and decorum of their bearing and their exemplary discipline made Western observers compare them to monks; and indeed they lived in their messes a semi-monastic life. Marriage was perhaps forbidden, certainly discouraged. Such sons as they might have were banned from entry into the state machine; usually they were invested with lands and so melted imperceptibly into the free-born Moslem population.

Corresponding to the importance of their function the Janissaries had certain high privileges. They were immune from taxation; paid, lodged, fed and uniformed by the state. From the time of Bâyazid II they were amenable to justice only in special courts of their own. They were liable to execution only after expulsion from the Corps, and could be expelled only with the consent of the Corps. So that while on the one hand they were and remained slaves of the Sultan, holding their lives and possessions only at his pleasure, on the other hand, vis-à-vis the rest of the population they enjoyed some of the prerogatives which in Europe appertained to the nobility. And this was even truer of the higher officials of state, the products of that other, higher, course of training which is now to be outlined.

The handsomest and most intelligent of the boy slaves were from the outset distributed between the Pages' Schools in the three Imperial palaces of Pera, Adrianople and İstanbul. These Pages' Schools in some ways suggest a sort of glorified Public School, though of course birth and wealth were not qualifications for entry. They were divided into "chambers", corresponding to classes. The younger boys spent five years in one or more of the lower chambers, being put through an intensive course of Humanities—comprising Holy Writ and Arabic and Persian literature—and of sport, including riding and the handling of arms. They were under supervision day and night, the part of prefects being played by (white) eunuchs. These had to inculcate absolute obedience, modesty and decorum; infractions of which were punished by severe though systematically limited caning.

On completion of these studies, the rank and file were put to the more menial duties about the palace, and eventually formed the bulk of the Imperial cavalry (the Spahis of the Porte). But the elect minority moved up through a succession of higher chambers (pantry, treasury, etc.) to emerge as Pages of the Bed-chamber, where they made up the Imperial couch and stood watch over their master's slumbers. These practical duties about the court ran parallel with higher training in arms and philosophy—including theology and ethics—till at the age of twenty-five they passed out of the school, after an inspiring address by the Sultan in the tradition of our best Headmasters, and with a number of gifts by way of prizes: a horse, a purse and a robe of honour.

These graduates at once became officers of the Imperial cavalry, which

together with the Janissaries formed the Sultan's standing army. Like the Janissaries the Spahis doubled the parts of soldiers and administrators. Their captains governed cities, their colonels whole districts, their brigadiers and generals provinces and countries. And besides thus filling all the higher posts in the civil service, they provided the officers for the corps of feudal levies and the staff officers for even the Janissaries. Finally, it was the ablest of them who rose to constitute the Government, becoming members of the Sultan's Divân or Supreme Council. The head of the Government, the Grand Vezîr, occupied a post of tremendous power and responsibility, equalled by its tremendous dangers. For the average term of office was $2\frac{1}{2}$ years, and one Grand Vezîr in ten lost his life with his office. Another reminder of what it is only too easy for us to forget: that all these great lords, generals, admirals and viceroys were foreigners of obscure and usually humble extraction and remained while they lived—slaves.

The transatlantic scholar who has done more than anyone to throw light on this system characterises it like this:

“The Ottoman system took boys from the sheep-run and the plow-tail and made them courtiers and ministers of state and husbands of princesses. It took young men, whose ancestors had borne the Christian name for generations, and made them rulers in the greatest of Moslem states and champions of the Crescent against the Cross. It never asked its novices: ‘Who was your father?’ or: ‘What do you know?’ or even: ‘Can you speak our tongue?’ But it studied their faces and their frames and said: ‘*You* shall be a soldier, and, if you show yourself worthy, a general’; or: ‘*You* shall be a scholar and gentleman and, if the ability lies in you, a governor and a Prime Minister.’ Disregarding religious and social prejudices and the fabric of fundamental customs which is called human nature, the Ottoman system took children for ever from their parents, discouraged family cares among its members through their most active years, gave them no certain hold on property, no promise that *their* children would profit by their success and sacrifice, raised and lowered them with no regard for ancestry or previous distinction, taught them a strange law, ethics and religion, and ever kept them conscious of a sword raised above their heads which might end at any moment a brilliant career along a matchless path of human glory.”

The gist of all this is that the Ottoman Empire was won and run by some score of thousands of Janissaries and Spahis of the Porte. (Sulaimân increased the numbers of the Janissaries from 12,000 to 20,000; the Spahis remained at about half that figure.) And these Janissaries and Spahis were alike foreign slaves: one-third or more of them consisted of children of the Balkanic peoples who were the Sultan's own subjects; the rest were drawn from almost every nation of Europe and especially from those of Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean basin. We cannot measure the effect on those countries of such a constant drain of their best human material; but with that in mind, it is little wonder that the Ottomans were able to achieve what had baffled all their nomad predecessors.

In conclusion a word must be said about the weaknesses of the system and the causes of its ultimate breakdown.

Firstly, there was the disparity between the power and the education of the Janissaries, who were encouraged but not even compelled to learn reading and writing. Like other praetorian guards before them, they came to exercise an ever greater and more mischievous influence on policy.

They began by exacting largesses and rises of pay at the accession of each fresh Sultan. These demands were traditionally signalled by rioting; so that on the one hand they tended to undermine discipline and on the other to deplete the Treasury.

Secondly, there was the growth of privileges and immunities, such as the special courts. These again had two effects: they inflamed the *esprit de corps* and sense of power of the Janissaries themselves, while at the same time making

their position more enviable in the eyes of the Moslem population and so increasing Moslem pressure to gain the right of admission. In the long run this pressure was successful: in 1574 the Janissaries extorted the right of entry into the Corps for their own sons; ten years later every sort of Moslem vagabond was being roped in for the Persian campaign; and with the increase in pay and numbers (to 70,000 by 1683, 96,000 by 1715 and over 100,000 in 1825) more and more abuses crept in: the earlier monastic discipline broke down; families became common, and with them family cares, and preoccupations with money-making.

Finally, this relaxation of discipline and increased sense of importance made for ever more direct and disastrous political intervention. The sort of insubordination that forced Selim to evacuate İrân was rare. More frequent and more fatal was their interference, and more especially the threat of their interference in the succession to the throne. Of course the Janissaries favoured the most warlike and energetic princes; so that their interference might have been expected to act as a sort of natural selection to secure the succession of the fittest. But in practice the reigning Sultan once he had reached or passed the height of his powers was bound to fear that the Janissaries would forestall time and dethrone him in favour of the most capable of his sons; as in fact they had helped Selim to supplant Bâyazid II. To avert this threat the Sultans were therefore tempted to destroy all the ablest of their potential successors; and indeed, from the time of Sulaimân onward, we see the throne occupied by an almost unbroken succession of children, weaklings and profligates.

Now, the Ottoman military machine was an extraordinary precision instrument. But for its satisfactory functioning two conditions were requisite: a succession of wars, and a succession of great military leaders on the throne. Sulaimân undermined the organisation he had inherited both at the base and at the summit. At the base by selling offices and by awarding them to his favourites, so that after him merit ceased to be the only criterion of preferment, and appointees, however able, had to combine efficiency with moneymaking (which of course meant compromising efficiency). At the summit he ruined the system when, in his later years, he ceased to preside personally over the meetings of the Divân and when he allowed the influence of the harem to dictate the deaths of his two able sons, Muştafâ and Bâyazid, so that there remained to succeed him only Selim, whom History has surnamed "the Sot".

With the admission into the State machine of Moslems and children of serving personnel, the Russian slave trade had lost its historical significance, though it was many a decade before the Tatars of the Crimea ceased their raids into Muscovy and Poland and the sale and export of the captives they brought back with them. But the turn of the tide and the last defeat of the nomads is another story.

FRANK FRIEDEBERG SEELEY.